

Managing relationships with professionals

As a carer, it is possible you may deal with a wide range of professional staff. These people may work for the government or support organisations. In an ideal world a carer, and the professional staff we might deal with, would work harmoniously together – united in the common aim of providing the best possible care, strategies and resources.

The reality can be very different. Professionals and people in authority can sometimes appear like an enemy. You may experience some professionals as aloof, uncaring, difficult to access and unwilling to share information. Likewise a carer can be cast in the role of being “difficult” and “demanding” as they fight for basic rights for the person they are caring for.

Below, is a selection of approaches and strategies that are intended to make it more likely that you (the carer) and the professionals you interact with develop a shared goal, have clarity and work together constructively.

10 tips for carers when interacting with professionals

It is possible you will get more control of the situation and more readily achieve your goals if you use some of the following approaches:

1. Before you make contact, try to be optimistic. Getting into an “open and positive” frame of mind, believing that they will be in a position to be helpful, will help frame a constructive connection.
2. Get really clear on what you are wanting before you make contact. It may be useful to talk to other carers about what could be possible. Sometimes we make contact with professionals because we don't like something that is happening. It is good to take a moment to figure out “what you are wanting” – not what you don't want.

Other times we make contact with professionals because we believe there are some supports or resources that would assist us. Again, it is ideal if we approach them with a clear idea of what we are looking for and how we think they can support us.

3. After you have stated what you want, it can be useful to express how obtaining it will bring about a positive result for you, the person you are caring for AND the professional you are talking to. This clearly reinforces the value of what you are wanting.

It can be important to remember that most people get involved with the “human services” because they want to ‘do the right thing’ or ‘be useful to other people’. Professionals sometimes appreciate being recognised as people who are trying to do the right thing. You describing how this can happen can be very helpful.

Help them find a way to help you, and you will make their day.

4. Try to set up a partnership. Get alongside the professional. Be unfailingly polite, friendly and calm. Be clear about what you can offer and find out, from them, what they need in the situation.

5. Acknowledge their specialised knowledge and skills. They have access to knowledge, skills and other resources you might need.
6. Understand the constraints they might work under. It is possible they are working with many complex situations with very little time or support themselves. Don't shoot the messenger. Ask them to help find ways around, under or through the apparent brick walls.
7. Keep remembering that you are probably "both on the same side".
8. Remember it is possible (likely) that nobody knows your family member, or the person you have been caring for, better than you do. See if the professional can meet your family member. Showing can be better than telling.
9. Trust your own judgement about what feels right. You know what you and your family/situation can realistically manage.
10. Stay very clear about your goals in any meeting. Know what you want and be prepared to keep asking for it.

In some situations, you may come across a professional who does not have the authority to action what you need or the skills to appropriately understand or respond to your situation. You may need to work with them to see if there is someone else you, or ideally both of you, need to involve in your situation.

It can be a good idea to contact other local carers before making contact with a professional. Other carers in your area may know who the "best" professional to contact is.